

Nativised Prepositional Verbs in Malaysian English from the Perspective of Language Contact

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a corpus-based approach to explore processes of contact-induced change underlying the use of four nativised prepositional verbs (PrVs) in Malaysian English (ME)—comprise of, demand for, discuss about and discuss on. Located within Winford's (2003) framework of group Second Language Acquisition (group SLA), this article compares the contexts of these PrVs with those of their corresponding single word verbs (SWVs). It is argued that there is a link between the polysemous nature of the SWVs comprise, demand and discuss in ME and the relevance of the nativised PrVs. Based on evidence of usage, it is concluded that the prepositions of, for, about and on in these PrVs are used to keep track of the transitivity of the SWVs in certain contexts. The fact that these PrVs recur in the relatively formal register of newspaper texts and the fact that they occur in systematic and stable syntactic environments suggest that they have become institutionalised. This study demonstrates the value of language contact theories—in particular, those within the group SLA framework—for elucidating the processes and outcomes of structural nativisation in varieties of English that have emerged in postcolonial settings.

Keywords: Malaysian English; nativised prepositional verbs; language contact; group Second Language Acquisition; corpus-based approach

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the processes of contact-induced change underlying the emergence and continuing use of nativised prepositional verbs (henceforth PrVs) in Malaysian English (ME). Nativised PrVs are, of course, not limited to ME. They have been associated with, for instance, Standard Nigerian English (Bamgbose 1992) and Philippine English (Gonzales 1983). Seidlhofer (2005, p. R92) includes them in her list of lexico-grammatical features of English as a Lingua Franca which “do not seem to interfere with intelligibility.” Their prevalence also led Schneider (2004, p. 227-249) to use their frequency, productivity and patterns of use to “trace structural nativisation” in diverse World Englishes. The present study focuses on four PrVs that are frequently observed in ME—*comprise of, demand for, discuss about and discuss on*.

Typically occurring in contexts where so-called native speakers of English would use the corresponding single-word verbs (SWVs)—in this case, *comprise, demand* and *discuss*—these features are the bane of the purists in Malaysia. Textbook and workbook writers routinely flag them as erroneous and “redundant” (Lee 2004, p. 33), while newspapers devote entire sections to educating the public about the ungrammaticality of these and other such features. Newspaper readers regularly write in with their comments on “glaring errors like *discuss about* (and) *voice out*” (Noreen Retnam 2010).

In spite of the negative attention that these PrVs have received, they continue to thrive in the speech and writing of many Malaysians. This study uses a corpus-based approach to demonstrate that these patterns are the products of language contact, in particular, of the

group Second Language Acquisition (group SLA) of English in Malaysia. Based on the contexts of these nativised PrVs and their corresponding SWVs, it is concluded that there are semantic differences between these two groups of linguistic variants which may have contributed to the relevance of the PrVs in ME. The non-arbitrary choice of preposition in the formation of these PrVs suggests that simplification and rule regularisation have a role to play in the nativisation of these features. Beyond these group SLA processes, there is evidence that their usage allows ME users to adapt the structure surrounding particular verbs in order to achieve semantic accuracy.

LANGUAGE CONTACT AND MALAYSIAN ENGLISH

In Malaysia, the English language comes into contact with diverse, typologically-distinct languages that include various Malay dialects, varieties of Chinese languages such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese and Mandarin; languages spoken by the local South Asian communities such as Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam; languages spoken by diverse indigenous groups of Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo; and creoles such as Baba Malay and Kristang (Asmah 1982, p. 55-59). Of these languages, Malay, Cantonese, Hokkien and Tamil have been the most influential in contributing to changes in the linguistic system of ME (Platt & Weber 1980). Widespread bilingualism in various combinations of these languages among people who have acquired English as a second language and, in some cases, maintain it as their primary language in many everyday domains has produced numerous types of contact-induced changes in the local variety of English. Studies of ME over the last four decades have greatly enhanced our knowledge of the linguistic variation and change, as well as the sociolinguistic context, of ME.

Some of the ground-breaking studies that have contributed to our understanding of the evolution of this variety of English include Tongue's (1974) insightful documentation of the linguistic features of the English of Singapore and Malaysia, and Platt and Weber's (1980) sociolinguistic study of the development of English-medium education during the British colonial period and the gradual emergence of Singapore-Malayan English. In addition to these broad sociolinguistic descriptions, there have also been studies that focus on specific aspects of the interface between language contact and ME. Research on the process of lexical borrowing, and the mechanisms of code-switching and code-mixing in particular have given us new ways of interpreting variation and change in ME (Lowenberg 1991, David 2003, Hajar & Harshita 2003, Kow 2003, Rajadurai 2007, Azirah & Leitner 2011).

More recently, Schneider's (2003a, 2007) Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes has revived interest in the study of institutionalised second-language varieties as evolving systems that go through a "life cycle" (Moag 1982). Based on language contact theories, this model illustrates how the transplantation of English into diverse "colonial-contact setting(s)" (Schneider 2007, p. 29) has resulted in patterns of linguistic changes that are governed fundamentally by how English-speaking colonists and indigenous residents construct and rewrite their identities during five distinct phases of contact. These phases—foundation, exonormative stabilisation, nativisation, endonormative stabilisation and differentiation—can be broadly distinguished in terms of the socio-political and historical events that marked the period, the significant sociolinguistic factors that shaped the contact situation, and the structural changes that emerged during the period of evolution. Schneider (2003b, 2007) places contemporary ME at its third phase of evolution—the nativisation phase. Characterised by widespread multilingualism in English and in diverse ancestral languages of the population, the contact setting during this phase is said to promote structural changes in ME that reflect the local identities of its speakers. These changes include the incorporation of

localised vocabulary items and pronunciation patterns, and structural nativisation manifested at the morphological and syntactic levels. In spite of these broad-ranging changes, there is evidence that ME is still largely “exonormatively oriented” as manifested by its dispreference for nativised features in the written contexts (Collins & Yao 2013). In the field of applied linguistics, the tendency to view widespread (some might argue “institutionalised”) grammatical divergences from so-called native varieties of English as evidence of developing interlanguage competence is still very strong (Siti Hamin & Mohd Mustafa 2010, Wong 2012).

This article argues for the need for scholars of ME to adopt a more endonormative perspective, one which separates nativised features from learner errors, and approaches the former as natural outcomes of language contact associated with the group acquisition and maintenance of English in a multilingual context. It is proposed that such an approach will produce a more nuanced understanding of the precise ways in which structural nativisation has impacted the linguistic system of ME.

METHOD

Located within Winford’s (2003, p. 235-247) framework of group SLA, this study emphasises the importance of interpreting nativised features of ME within their sociolinguistic contexts. This framework is particularly suited for the analysis of varieties of English that have emerged in countries where colonisation was the route through which English first gained entry, and English-medium education was the main mechanism through which the language gained foothold and subsequently spread (Mesthrie & Bhatt 2008, p. 156). Such varieties generally exhibit linguistic changes that are similar to those “variable and ephemeral” (Winford 2003, p. 236) changes that occur as individuals acquire or learn English as a second language. However, as many of these local varieties eventually become everyday vernaculars of the local populations, some of these individual SLA features go on to become “fixed and permanent” (ibid.) or institutionalised changes which, in many cases, index ethnic and national identities of their speakers, or serve specific communicative or pragmatic functions.

This study utilises the structural principles and processes that have been used to describe individual SLA. Drawing on the explanatory potential of substrate influences, simplification strategies and the regularising tendency of the English language, this study nevertheless emphasises the permanence and relevance of these linguistic changes. Instead of interpreting these changes as approximation of the target language system, it regards them as stable manifestations of the continuing use of the second language in a sociolinguistic milieu shaped by the demographic structure of Malaysia, the competition among the languages in contact, and the attitudes of the users of the language. Nativised features are hence treated as inherent parts of a linguistic system which, even though divergent from the system used in native-speaker contexts, is familiar and relevant to its community of multilingual speakers.

The present study derives evidence of linguistic change from a corpus of Malaysian English newspaper articles (herein named the *Malaysian English Newspaper Corpus*, or the MEN Corpus). The MEN Corpus is a five-million-word corpus of newspaper articles published between 1 August 2001 and 30 January 2002, and sourced from two of the most authoritative English language dailies in Malaysia—*The Star* and the *New Straits Times*. A total of 91 issues were sampled. The final corpus consists of a balanced spread of text categories which includes local and national news stories, regional and international news reportage by Malaysian correspondents overseas, news stories produced by *Bernama*—the Malaysian National News Agency, court reports, parliamentary reports, opinion pieces

(including comments, letters to the editor and editorials), business and financial news, sports news, and features.

It has been argued that corpus-based methods are far more rigorous as they allow for the exhaustive extraction of authentic uses of the features targeted (Kennedy 1998, p. 88-203). For the present purpose, a corpus-based approach has at least two other advantages—it enables systematic comparisons between the contexts of the PrVs with those of their corresponding SWVs, and facilitates the identification of the underlying processes that have led to the creation and continuing use of nativised PrVs. In addition to the general advantages of a corpus-based approach, the use of a newspaper corpus is a convenient way of examining these nativised PrVs in their institutionalised contexts. That they occur in the relatively formal register of newspaper texts must surely say something about their prevalence in ME in general, but perhaps also ME speakers' acceptance (even if sub-conscious) of their use. An understanding of the nativisation of such features can only contribute to a greater comprehension of the stabilising norms of ME.

The present study adopts a lexico-grammatical approach in analysing and comparing the contexts of the four PrVs (*comprise of*, *demand for*, *discuss about* and *discuss on*) and those of the “standard” features (*comprise*, *demand* and *discuss*). This line of enquiry is based on the hypothesis that there are subtle but distinct semantic and syntactic differences between nativised PrVs and their corresponding SWVs in ME, and that the continuing relevance of the nativised patterns can be explained in terms of these lexico-grammatical differences.

The MEN Corpus was analysed using *WordSmith Tools 5*, a software package created by Mike Scott. WordSmith is a set of three tools—*Wordlist*, *Concord* and *Keywords*, and these can be used separately or in conjunction with each other to examine how words in a collection of texts are used. This study relies mainly on Concord, a program that is able to look for all instances of a particular search word in a corpus and present each of them in the form of a concordance line. Each concordance line comprises the search word plus a pre-specified amount of context. The entire set of concordance lines and information about where each instance of the search word can be found in the corpus are presented in a concordance list. Through this list, it is possible to access additional information about words or word clusters that occur near the search word.

The MEN Corpus is untagged, and as such, it was not possible to automatically generate the concordance lists needed for the study of the selected PrVs. Instead, they had to be extracted from the results of wildcard searches. For instance, searching for *demand** in the MEN Corpus yielded 1034 entries comprising the following: instances of finite and non-finite verb phrases deriving from the search word, the noun forms *demand* and *demands*, the adjective *demand* (as in “a demand surge”), and fixed expressions like *letter of demand*, *in demand* and *on demand*. For the purpose of the present study, only instances of finite and non-finite verb phrases deriving from *demand*—272 in total—were extracted. The final list includes instances of *demand* as the main verb—either alone or with auxiliaries—of a clause:

1. Such mediocre performance year after year *demands* a serious review.
2. The human smuggler *will be demanding* his fee.

It also contains instances of *demand* as a non-finite verb which heads a non-finite clause functioning as a noun, adjective or adverb:

3. A Perak Water Board engineer is being investigated by the Anti-Corruption Agency for allegedly *demanding* sex from a businesswoman in return for a contract awarded last month.

4. He was responding to concerns raised by driving instructors over the *demanding* test.
5. On Nov 4, almost a million people gathered in Alexander Square in East Berlin to *demand* reforms in East Germany.

The list also includes occurrences of the PrV *demand for*, as in:

6. Anjin said they would *demand for* compensation from the lorry driver.

To facilitate the comparison of the contexts of *demand* with those of *demand for*, their concordance lines were separated. The results were two lists, one comprising 257 entries for the SWV *demand* and the other comprising 15 entries for the PrV *demand for* (see Figure 1). Collectively, these lists formed the raw data for the study of the PrV *demand for*.

Capturing all instances of each PrV was a little more involved than the description thus far might suggest. Due to the occasional non-contiguity of the verb and the preposition (e.g., “I will look into every problem and then *discuss* with Europlus or the related local authority on the period of time needed to rectify each issue.”), it was often necessary to refer to the wider context of these PrVs. Only by doing so was it possible to extract all instances of the four PrVs, irrespective of the number of words intervening between the verb and the preposition. Using this method, seven concordance lists were generated for analysis.

1	law,” he said yesterday. Anjin said they would	demand	for compensation from the lorry driver or owner
2	today. And as customers increasingly	demand	for the right content in the right format, via the
3	He said he would meet the barge operator to	demand	for compensation, adding that he would raise the
4	to legalise polygamy, then we women should	demand	for equality in this. We too would like to have a
5	“Why is your face not happy with me?” They	demand	for full attention from the adults around them.
6	the right to return the T-shirts to the shop and	demand	for a new batch of T-shirts of the same quality
7	is a growing need as people are beginning to	demand	for alternative choices to commercial counter
8	aware of his (cousin brother’s) whereabouts and	demand	for his contact number. “After giving them the
9	Azahir said after handing over the memorandum	demand	for the meeting to the FA president, Datuk Wan
10	with a dozen opposition members on their feet	demand	for specific dates of the publications. Zainudin
11	workers with the aim of lulling them into not	demand	for high wages, he said: “Does the State
12	This brought PAS members to their feet	demand	for clarification, which was denied. The
13	Dr Hasan Mohd Ali, who heads the pack in	demand	for accountability from Selangor Mentri Besar
14	nearly everyday at my office and my handphone	demand	for payment, but I cannot do anything as Asum
15	conduct in the campus. “The authority is merely	demand	for explanations on their involvement in

FIGURE 1. Concordance list of *demand for* from the MEN Corpus

NATIVISED PREPOSITIONAL VERBS IN MALAYSIAN ENGLISH

While frequently noted in descriptions of ME, nativised PrVs are actually not as well-represented as the more established SWVs in the MEN Corpus. As shown in Table 1, although these PrVs are recurrent, their corresponding SWVs are far more frequent. It is, however, important not to dismiss these nativised patterns as mere variants of their more established “standard” forms. From evidence of usage, it is clear that although every occurrence of a PrV can be replaced by its corresponding SWV without any loss of meaning or structure, the converse is not true. That is to say, there are instances of a SWV that cannot logically be replaced by a nativised PrV, and this was the point of departure of the present study.

A survey of the seven concordance lists found three of the four PrVs (excepting *demand for*) to be semantically more limited compared to their corresponding SWVs.

TABLE 1. Comparative frequencies of PrVs and corresponding SWVs in the MEN Corpus

Verb	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
comprise	799	96
<i>comprise of</i>	29	4
Total	828	100
demand	257	94
<i>demand for</i>	15	6
Total	272	100
discuss	796	96
<i>discuss about</i>	7	1
<i>discuss on</i>	26	3
Total	829	100

The semantic distinctiveness of *discuss about* and *discuss on* was deduced from three concordance lists comprising 796 instances of the SWV *discuss*, 7 instances of the PrV *discuss about* and 26 instances of the PrV *discuss on*. From the concordance list of *discuss*, it is clear that in ME, this verb has two main meanings—“to talk over or to consider (something)” and “to hold a discussion.”

The first meaning, which occurs in 766 of the 796 instances of *discuss* (96%), requires the verb to co-occur with a “verbiage”—the subject matter of the discussion (Butt et al. 2000, p. 57). Hence, in active constructions, the SWV *discuss* takes a direct object and is clearly transitive, as demonstrated in the example below:

7. PAS is seeking a meeting with the Home Minister to *discuss* [the ban on political ceramah].

The intrinsic transitivity of this meaning of *discuss* is also observed in non-finite clauses and passive constructions. In the following examples, the verbiage (enclosed in square brackets) emphasises the inherent transitivity of *discuss*:

8. The report said Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar had met US Secretary of State Colin Powell to *discuss* [a meeting between the two leaders].
9. [All aspects of FDI] *will be discussed* in earnest by the leaders, Government senior officials and members of the private sector.

This is by far the most common sense of the verb *discuss* in native-speaker varieties. In ME, however, *discuss* can also be used as an intransitive verb to mean “to hold a discussion.” This second meaning occurs in the remaining 30 of the 796 concordance lines (4%) of *discuss* extracted from the MEN Corpus. In this case, the verbiage is not explicitly stated though it can often be inferred from the context. This intransitive use of *discuss* is generally regarded as erroneous in prescriptive grammars (see, e.g., Turton & Heaton’s [1996, p. 101] *Longman Dictionary of Common Errors*). The following example illustrates how *discuss* can occur without a direct object in ME:

10. The entrepreneur has *discussed* with me and I agreed in principle to have joint programmes with him.

Discuss on and *discuss about* are never used to express this second meaning. All instances of these PrVs in the MEN Corpus are used to express the first meaning “to talk over or to consider (something)”:

11. The symposium stemmed from the desire to act and not merely *discuss about* [the social ills that plague the society].
12. They are already *discussing on* [how packages can be customised to suit their budget].

It seems likely that the relevance of these two nativised PrVs is contributed by the polysemous nature of the word *discuss* in ME. The duality in the meaning of *discuss* may be due to influences of substrate languages, such as Malay and Chinese. The Malay and Chinese equivalents of *discuss*—*bincang* and 讨论—can be both transitive and intransitive. In the case of Malay, the affixes used with *bincang* determine whether the verb is transitive (*membincangkan*) or intransitive (*berbincang*) (Abd. Aziz 2003, p. 76). The fact that the PrVs *discuss about* and *discuss on* are used exclusively in the transitive sense suggests that the prepositions *about* and *on* might have been used to stress the transitivity of the verb *discuss*.

The choice of preposition does not appear to be arbitrary. Noun + preposition combinations in the English language such as *discussion about* and *discussion on* clearly have a role to play in validating the use of the PrVs *discuss about* and *discuss on*. Even more significant are the inherent properties of the prepositions *about* and *on* which predispose them to co-occurrence with a wide range of communication verbs to produce collocational combinations such as *ask about*, *brag about*, *comment about/on*, *complain about*, *debate about/on*, *enquire about*, *gossip about*, *lament about/on*, *lecture about/on*, *rave about*, *speak about/on*, *talk about/on*, *touch on*, *write about/on*, and so on. The preposition in these forms typically links the verb to an object, and emphasises that the noun phrase that comes after the preposition is the verbiage of the process represented by the verb. This might have provided ME users with the basis for the adoption and continuing use of the PrVs *discuss about* and *discuss on*.

The processes underlying the nativisation of the PrV *comprise of* are harder to identify primarily because of the lack of consensus, even among native speakers, on the “proper” usage of the word *comprise*, and in fact on the exact definition of the word.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists nine discrete definitions for the verb *comprise* although many of these are either obsolete or very rare. Most dictionaries give the main definition of *comprise* as “to consist of, to be composed of,” with the implication that an exhaustive list of the parts that make up the subject will follow the verb (e.g., “The country *comprises* twenty states.” [Oxford Dictionaries]). The subject position is therefore occupied by the whole while the object position is occupied by the components that make up the whole. There is, however, a second, increasingly common, usage of *comprise* which has led some dictionaries to allow another related definition—“to make up, to compose” (e.g., “These essays together with those contained in this volume *comprised* the total of C. S. Lewis’s essays on literature.” [Oxford English Dictionary]). This definition of *comprise* requires the whole to be placed in the object position and its parts to be placed in the subject position. This second definition complicates matters in two ways. First, the second meaning is essentially the first meaning expressed in the passive (e.g., “The total of C. S. Lewis’s essays on literature is *comprised of* these essays together with those contained in this volume.”). Second, one can just as easily use the verb in the active voice without switching the subject and object around, and still mean exactly the same thing: “The total of C. S. Lewis’s essays on literature *comprised* these essays together with those contained in this volume.”

In spite of these incongruities, most contemporary dictionaries regard both definitions of *comprise* to be within the boundaries of acceptability. The use of the PrV *comprise of* (e.g.,

“The former Soviet Union *comprised of* fifteen union republics.”) is however widely regarded as an error (Turton & Heaton 1996, p. 76).

This PrV nevertheless occurs in ME. As shown in Table 1 above, there are 29 instances of *comprise of* compared to 799 instances of *comprise* in the MEN Corpus. The main senses of *comprise* in ME coincide with the dictionary definitions mentioned above. The most prominent sense of this word (reflected in 762 of the 799 instances of *comprise* [95%]) is the first definition, which is glossed here as “to consist of.” The example below illustrates this use of the word:

13. The team *comprising* [undergraduates Chan Sheau Peng, Euzanin Yaacob, Lee Fui Feng and Norazinali Sham, all from the Accounting Faculty], walked away with the challenge trophy.

The second meaning—“to make up”—is much less significant, occurring only in 22 of the 799 instances of *comprise* (3%):

14. To say that this is applicable to a majority would be unfair to our civic conscious citizens, who, thankfully, *comprise* [a fair portion of our society].

The remaining 15 entries (2%) express minor senses such as “to include,” “to mean,” and “to be equal to.”

In contrast to the diverse meanings of *comprise*, the PrV *comprise of* is associated with only one meaning—“to consist of.” The following is a clear example:

15. According to our analysis, the voters *comprise of* [297 Malays, 469 Chinese, 39 Indians and four from other races].

Several factors could have contributed to the limited meaning of *comprise of* in comparison with *comprise* in ME. The generalisation of the structure of “legitimate” multi-word constructions such as the PrV *consist of*, and the passive forms *is composed of* and *is made up of* is an explanation that must be considered. Substrate influence from Malay is also plausible. The Malay equivalent of *comprise* is the multi-word form *terdiri daripada*, literally, “is formed of” (Noresah 2002, p. 308). It seems likely that both substrate influence and generalisation of existing English verbal forms have a role to play, and that these processes interact to legitimise the use of the PrV *comprise of* to express the meaning “to consist of,” but not the meaning “to make up.”

Unlike the three PrVs discussed so far, the range of meanings that the nativised PrV *demand for* is able to express in comparison with *demand* is largely unremarkable. *Demand* and *demand for* appear 257 times and 15 times respectively in the MEN Corpus. Both have the same principal meaning—“to ask for something in a manner that is urgent and imperious.” This meaning accounts for 123 of the 257 concordance lines of *demand* (48%), and 8 of the 15 concordance lines of *demand for* (53%). The following are typical examples of this use of *demand* and *demand for*:

16. The woman was alone in the toilet at about 1.30pm when the man, armed with a knife, barged in and *demand*ed [her purse].
17. She said that the thugs then turned violent when they learned that she was not aware of his (cousin brother's) whereabouts and *demand*ed for [his contact number].

Besides this main meaning, five other definitions of *demand* can be found in the MEN Corpus. Three of these are also expressed by *demand for*. They are: “to require, to have a need of”; “to ask for something authoritatively, to claim what one is legally or rightfully entitled to”; and “to ask to be informed of something.”

The last two meanings of *demand* are not shared by *demand for*. First is the relatively widespread (46 of the concordance lines of *demand* [18%]) attributive and predicative uses of the participial adjective *demanding*, meaning “requiring a lot of effort and ability” (e.g., “a *demanding* adventure race”; “her work has been *demanding*”). The fact that this meaning is not reflected in any of the concordance lines of *demand for* is unsurprising, as the structure of the PrV precludes its use as a participial adjective (e.g., “a *demanding for* adventure race”*). The second meaning which is not expressed by any of the 15 instances of *demand for* is “to require as just or right” (e.g., “it *demand*s a strong political leadership”). This sense occurs in 9 of the concordance lines of *demand* (4%).

The lack of concrete evidence of semantic distinctiveness aside, the relevance of the PrV *demand for* also seems to be related to the need to reinforce the link between the verb *demand* and the thing demanded, and to foreground the transitivity of the construction. The nominal form *demand for*, as well as the countless semantically-related PrVs—*appeal for*, *ask for*, *beg for*, *call for*, *clamour for*, *fight for*, *opt for*, *plead for*, *pray for*, *press for*, *push for* and *yearn for*—all allude to this specific function of the preposition *for*.

In short, the relevance of three of the four PrVs studied here appears to be linked to the nativisation of their corresponding SWVs in ME. While strongly transitive in native-speaker varieties, these SWVs seem less so in ME. As such, when transitivity is indicated, some ME users emphasise or mark this fact using prepositions such as *of*, *for*, *about* and *on*. In the context of ME, the fact that SWVs such as *comprise* and *discuss* have undergone semantic changes, potentially as a result of substrate influences, must be taken into account in the reconstruction of possible underlying processes that have led to this type of structural nativisation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although this study is based on a small pool of data—77 instances of nativised PrVs and 1852 instances of their corresponding SWVs—there is enough evidence to support the argument that these PrVs have become institutionalised. The fact that they recur in the MEN Corpus suggests that they have been, as Winford (2003, p. 236) puts it, “conventionalized as part of the communal grammar.” The MEN Corpus represents not the entirety of ME, but a subset that is produced by educated ME speakers for a relatively formal domain. Many newspapers in Malaysia are still governed by the belief that standard English equals authority and quality. Therefore, although localised lexical features are well tolerated (Tan 2009a, 2009b), localised grammatical features are often avoided. The definite preference for the “standard” variant in cases where the context allows either the PrV or the SWV demonstrates this adherence to native-speaker norms. That the PrVs extracted in this study have crept into journalistic writing and have evaded the detection of editors must suggest that they have been conventionalised, at least to the degree that they do not appear unusual to the average ME speaker. The systematicity in the syntactic environment of these PrVs also indicates the formalisation of these features. This is not to suggest that ME speakers have deliberately and consciously negotiated for their acceptance as legitimate linguistic variants of the language. The institutionalisation of SLA features is a process of unconscious negotiation among ME speakers that has been likened to the sedimentation of “sand on the bottom of the lake

(Weinreich 1953, p. 11)—SLA features that are widespread and serve specific functions become conventionalised while others may not.

In their description of nativised PrVs, Kachru and Smith (2008) associate these features with the intricacy of English prepositions. According to them, the fact that “the use of prepositions is determined partly by their meaning and partly because of their formal grammatical requirement with no reference to their meaning” presents difficulty for non-native speakers of English (Kachru & Smith 2008, p. 99). The findings of the present study provide a slightly different interpretation. While there is some evidence that these PrVs are the products of generalisation in terms of the functions and syntactic environments of prepositions such as *of*, *for*, *about* and *on*, it is also clear that these prepositions serve specific syntactic functions in ME. The semantic complexity of SWVs such as *discuss* and *comprise* in ME is certainly a factor, which contributes to the relevance of these PrVs in the language. This, coupled with the non-arbitrary choice of preposition in the formation of these PrVs, suggests a systematic attempt by ME users to adapt the structure surrounding particular verbs in order to achieve semantic accuracy.

Such processes of adaptation are not restricted to ME. Sinclair (1991, p. 53-65), for instance, demonstrated the interaction between the different meanings of the word *yield* and the patterns that it takes using data extracted from the central corpus of the *Birmingham Collection of English Texts*. He found six instances of *yield up* where *up* is apparently used to emphasise the transitivity of *yield* in the sense of “to give way, submit or surrender, as through force or persuasion” (Sinclair 1991, p. 54). He noted that “*up* appears to be acting semantically as a completive, but syntactically it appears to be acting to make a transitive structure sound normal” (Sinclair 1991, p. 57).

Based on evidence of usage, it could reasonably be deduced that the nativised PrVs examined in this paper are the results of ME users’ need to achieve “maximum transparency” and “maximum salience” (Williams 1987, cited in Mesthrie & Bhatt 2008, p. 174). The need to be as transparent as possible is likely driven by the polysemous nature of the SWVs *comprise*, *discuss*, and to a lesser extent, *demand*, which in turn can partly be attributed to substrate influences. Clearly, the semantic complexity of these SWVs places the onus on ME users to exercise more control “in keeping track of their own production,” (Williams 1987, cited in Mesthrie & Bhatt 2008, p. 174.) and hence the “redundant” prepositions. These prepositions also allow ME users to maximise salience by emphasising the transitive relationship between the verb and the object. It thus seems clear that the processes underlying the nativisation of these PrVs in ME have a lexico-grammatical dimension.

In Malaysia, group SLA—whether through formal instruction or in natural settings—occurs in an environment which is dominated by second- or even foreign-language speakers of English. Granted, there is a sizeable group that maintains English as their dominant language, but overall, English does not have the same range and depth that it has in most native-speaker countries. Instead, the language competes and interacts with Malay, the national language and the language of the largest ethnic group; Hokkien and Cantonese, the ancestral languages of a sizeable segment of the Chinese community; Mandarin, the medium of instruction of Chinese schools; and Tamil, the most dominant South Asian language in the country. In such a context, SLA features resulting from generalisation and rule regularisation, and to a lesser degree, substrate influences, are well tolerated. This is especially so if they fulfill specific communication functions, as in the case of the nativised PrVs studied here. These features allow ME users to be maximally transparent in articulating the actual meaning of the verb and its relationship with other components of the clause.

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